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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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IMPORTANCE OF LITTLE THINGS.

"Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die. And Saul answered, God do so, and more also; for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."—Samuel XIV., 43, 44.

There was never a better cause worse plead than this of Jonathan. The right was all on his side, but his pleading was good for nothing. We shall understand this better, if we go back now, and come down for a few minutes along the history that led to this transaction, as it is contained in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of the first of Samuel. We must not carry back modern ideas to interpret the ancient ideas. We must not imagine that Israel at this time was a civilized people. We must not imagine cities such as existed in the time of our Saviour. They were a rude people. Although in some respects they were superior to their neighbors, in most respects they were not a whit higher in civilization than the Philistines themselves. A better moral light they had; but their social habits were no better. Their cities were rude assemblages of ruder huts. Their army was a mob. Chance determined their battles. Sometimes it was on the one side, and sometimes on the other, according to the nature of the men engaged. And Israel had sunk to a very low point at this time. Saul was a king not a whit more royal than an average Indian chief on our prairies. He was a king without a palace. He was a king without any of the circumstances and trappings of royalty as we now conceive of them.

Just at this time, Israel, was at such a point of depression, having been over-run and defeated by the Philistines, that there were no armies in the land. And yet, beaten down as they were, a great incursion of the Philistines was made upon them.

North of Jerusalem, or, rather, in the southern part of Palestine, on the west, was the great plain of the Philistines—a sea coast or maritime plain. And on the east was the valley of the Jordan. Intermediate, the country rose in high mountainous ridges, and yet was somewhat of the nature of table-land. Upon the summit of this central part of southern Palestine was a very rich farming or pastoral

SUNDAY EVENING, Nov. 6, 1870. LESSON: PSALMS II. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 660. 627. 372.

district; and along this ridge, running north from Jerusalem as far as Gerezim and Ebal. or Shechim, and coming down into the plain, was the great battle-ground of Palestine. It was back and forth over that country particularly that these endless Philistine wars flowed. At this time, the Philistines had come up with an enormous army—with thousands of chariots—the chariots probably not ascending further than the bottom of the ravines of the maritime plain. Israel had scattered and fled every whither from the face of the enemy. Saul had tried to collect about six hundred men; and he was lying at the uttermost space in Gibeah of Benjamin. And he and Jonathan alone had arms. There were no swords; there were no spears; there was no armor. The Philistines would not permit them to have forges. If they needed to sharpen their hoes, or their spades, or the colters of their plows, they must go down into Philistia. To keep them disarmed this method was resorted to.

Well, this was the condition of things. There were three great parties of the Philistines that had gone spoiling, one northward, and another southward, and another eastward, ravaging all the lands; and here was this little band of six hundred men, and the king, lying under a tree at Gibeah watching them.

One day, moved by one of those strange inspirations which sometimes come to men, looking up the ravine (on either side of which were two very high cliffs—one of which was named "Thorn Bush," and the other "Shining Cliff," because it was white and glistening, the limestone there being of a chalky nature)—looking up that ravine, with these two cliffs (the Thorn Cliff and the Shining-Faced Cliff) on either side, they saw the garrison of the Philistines upon the top. And Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Let us climb up there." Two men! Well, he had a brave fellow for an armor-bearer; for he said, "You go, and I will follow!" And Jonathan said, "If they say, 'Stand still where you are,' I shall take that for a sign that God does not mean us to succeed; but if they say, 'Come up hither,' then I shall take it for a sign that the Lord has delivered them into our hands." And so they began to climb up the ravine until they were discerned by the garrison; and they looked over at them; and—perhaps in derision, I do not know why—some fellow said, "Come up hither, and I will tell you somewhat." And Jonathan said, "Let us go up; for the Lord hath delivered them into our hands." And they went up. And the moment they reached the top they laid about them most violently; and Jonathan and his armor-bearer slew twenty men before they knew what they were doing—and that, too, as it is said, *in the space of half an acre, or what a yoke of oxen might plow in a day.*

At this time there occurred, apparently, an earthquake. For it is said that there was a great shaking of the ground. This precipitate attack, this slaughter of a few men, and the rumor of it that went out, produced one of those panics which rude and undisciplined armies are subject to. They did not know what ailed them, and they all turned to flee; and, thinking that the enemy were upon them, they began to strike right and left to slay the enemy, and slew themselves with terrible slaughter.

Saul was watching on one side and on the other, and tidings were sent down to him that there was a great movement in the camp above; and he called for his men, and they went up, and he with them, and began to pursue. And it is said that then all the deserters in the camp of the Philistines—those that had gone up to them—the turn-coats—the moment the Philistines began to flee, whipped out their weapons and went at them too, and began to slay them. And all those who had hid themselves in the caves (for that whole mountain region is seamed and honey-combed, and from that fact was a place of concealment, not only for men, but for treasures)—all those who had hid themselves, as soon as tidings came to them that the Philistines were fleeing (and it is astonishing how tidings will go sometimes) came out and were brave enough. The men who did not dare to do a thing in the beginning, and who were such cowardly fellows as to go over to the enemy and make peace with them, were very courageous when they found that the enemy were discomfited, and were not afraid to kill men that were running away from them. And all the skulkers and hiders were courageous enough when they were behind the enemy's back, and very boldly smote and thrust and ran through men that were already vanquished by fear, borrowing the Philistines' own weapons to slay them withal.

And so there went on through the woods a terrible slaughter right and left. And as Saul came up and saw what work was going on, he issued his command that no man should take food that day. And the command was not an unreasonable one; for many a victory is lost by plundering. Seeing the discomfiture of the enemy, perceiving their utter overthrow, he knew that the temptation would be to despoil the camp of the Philistines, and gather the plunder. He forbade the people from doing it, in the general expectation that they would be tempted to do it. And it was a wise thing. He said, "Let no man eat until the sun goes down."

Jonathan had been gone; he was far away, in hot pursuit of the enemy; and he did not hear that command. And as he went through the woods, seeing honey dropping, he put forth his rod and ate "a little." I do not know that he knew how much he ate. When a man is very hungry, he cannot tell how much "a little" is. But he

was refreshed by what he ate; his waning strength came again; and he went on fighting and chasing the enemy once more.

The people were very much spent, but they continued beating their adversaries clear on to sundown. Then they were permitted to eat. And they fell upon the sheep and the oxen and the calves, and slaughtered them, and ate them in their blood, so hungry were they. And they were reprimanded for that. But they were under the necessity of taking these animals and eating them in some way.

When Saul came up, he had it in his heart to renew the pursuit that night; and he consulted the prophet to see whether they should hasten on and utterly cut up the Philistines, root and branch. But he got no answer. And he said, "Some one has committed a sin; and that is the reason the Lord has not answered me." So he determined to cast lots, and find out who it was that had sinned. And they cast lots; and the tribes of the Israelites were on one side, and Saul and Jonathan were on the other; and Saul and Jonathan were alone uncleared, when all the Israelites had been cleared; and the thing lay between them.

"And Saul said, Draw ye near hither all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. For as the Lord liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him. Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee."

They were not our people. Oriental monarchs were allowed to do what they pleased. Occidental democrats are not.

"Therefore Saul said unto the Lord God of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped [and glad they were]. And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. [It was close work by this time.] And Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die. And Saul answered, God do so, and more also; for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan."

That was more than Roman rigor of mistaken justice. But the best of it is to come yet. The people were seized with an inspiration of generosity. They had not seen the wonderful spectacle of deliverance wrought by the bravery of this one man in vain.

"And the people said unto Saul, when it came to this [obsequious as they had been], Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

Good people! Cowardly people at first—but they ended brave enough, and withstood the fury of the king—though I suspect that Saul was not very unwilling to have his son rescued.

I said that Saul had a right to give this general order that there should be no stopping; that that day should be dedicated to the overthrow of the enemy; that no man should taste food. And yet, in this, as in all of Saul's conduct, there was a certain excess—an immoderation which carried it to rashness. For, while, as a general order, it was wise, to make it special and particular was not wise. And Jonathan, when he was arraigned by his father, had two pleas that he might have made, if he had been wise enough to make them. The first was, that he was absent when the command was given, and that he knew nothing of it until he was informed by the people after he had eaten the honey. That would have been a sufficient plea. Or, another better one he might have made, and that is the one which he did make to the people. Jonathan, when he was told that his father had cursed the man who should eat anything that day, said,

"My father hath troubled the land. See, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? For had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"

That was so. If the people had been refreshed by a moderate amount of food—which the king might well have winked at—they might have had greater strength, and made the overthrow still more victorious. So, then, he could have plead to his father, "I did not know the command; nor could I have known it, God's providence had placed me so." But, still better, he might have said, "The king commanded that which was contrary to the public welfare; and I, acting as a general under him, had a right to take the responsibility and disobey the command, when I saw that the thing which the king desired—viz., the overthrow of the enemy—could better be gained by disobedience; and I took the responsibility, and told the people to eat, and ate myself." That would have been a sufficient answer. For, it is held that, while a subordinate is always to obey his leader under ordinary circumstances; yet no man is fit to be a military general who will not on occasion take the responsibility of breaking an order. It is held that an exigency may arise in which the thing that the commanding general desires to gain, can be better gained by disobeying his order than by obeying it. But the subordinate must understand that if he breaks the command it is at his own risk; and that if he is mistaken he gets the penalty, while if he is right he gets the reward. And so, Jonathan seeing that the way to carry out Saul's purpose was to disobey his commandment, had a right to plead that. Had he done so, he would have stood before the king acquitted. But what did he do? I said at the opening of this discourse that he made the poorest plea for a good cause that ever was made. Instead of saying,

"I did not know your commands;" instead of saying, "Under God's providence the time came when that command ought to have been set aside for the sake of destroying the Philistines"—instead of saying these things, he said, "I did but taste a *little* honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand."

Oh! It was *such* a little! Well, is not a little always just enough for disobedience? A little is as important as a great deal, when it is the question of obedience or disobedience. Besides, there was in his heart the idea that moral quality depended in some sense on magnitude. And he was not alone in that. We hear yet a great deal said about little sins and little things. Men plead littles, and littles, and littles. And I have selected my subject to-night, because it seemed to me that a consideration of this matter of magnitude would be a very great help in clearing many minds from casuistry, and in setting forcibly before you the importance of a great many things which have vital relation to your safety, your character, your habits, and your destiny, but which are inconspicuous, which are easily passed by, and which are mostly neglected.

There is, I would say, before I proceed, a difference between moral values. There are great moral causes, and there are small moral causes. I would say still further, that men should not confound things that are little with things that are great, as sometimes they do. There are those who think that to work on Sunday is a sin as great as to destroy life. They make no distinction between acts. There is no perspective in their consciences. They get things mixed. And they are as much afflicted for small offences as for the weightiest sins, or even for crimes.

Now, there are distinctions; but they do not depend upon conspicuity, nor upon measurement, nor upon weight. It is not the amount of space that the thing occupies, nor the impression which it produces upon your eye, nor any external circumstance of this kind, that determines what is little and what is great. That is little which has little power, and that is great which has great power. But it oftentimes happens that the smallest thing, as the eye sees it, and as the senses recognize it, has the greatest power, and therefore is large; whereas, voluminous things, things huge in space and in impression, have in them very little moral influence, and therefore are small. But we are to transfer our ideas from the small realm of sense to the great moral realm. It is the effect which a thing is competent to produce that determines whether it is great, or whether it is little. And as a single grain of powder has in it more power than twenty tons of rock, so, frequently, the smallest circumstance in a man's moral history has more power in it than vast things in other relations.

Little things become important as a part of a series—that is, by aggregation. They collect, and become powerful unities.

A man asks you to see, floating in the air, the smallest film. It is the merest fragment of a fragment of a bit of wool. You cannot discern it except when the slanting beams of the sun, through the window, give to the afternoon air the peculiar quality of revealing what it contains. Then, among a million other motes, you can perhaps discern the tiniest bit of a floating mote. And as you look, you open your watch, and take out your key; and as you move through the air, that littlest bit of woolen fiber chances to strike the watch just where the key goes in. And you wind the watch, and think but little about it. And that little mote is seated within. And after a day or two, by winding the watch, it has been pushed on. And it creeps clear into the watch. And in the course of a week it finds its way near to a wheel. And then comes another little bit after it. Then there comes a speck; and then another speck. And in the course of months and months, so many little motes find their way into this same little keyhole that the watch is said to be "dirty." There are a thousand motes inside of the watch that have found their way there little by little. And what have they done? Broken any of the wheels? Not one of them. Have they disfigured any of the works? Not at all. Have they militated against the spring? Not at all. They merely lie up against the pivot, one and another and another, and just drag it; and the watch holds back just a little, and loses, and loses, and loses time. And the watch being neglected, these little motes, collecting on the works, have power enough, by multitude, to take away from the machinery its power to keep time. They have destroyed its functions and its efficiency. There is not one of them that was not so small that you could scarcely see it, unless you saw it by the help of a sunbeam or a magnifying glass; and yet, coming in one by one, adding one to another, and lying in juxtaposition, they interfere with the machinery of the watch. And if you had taken a hammer and broken the watch to pieces, you would not have destroyed its time-keeping qualities more effectually than they are destroyed by letting the soil of the atmosphere into it. And if the watch be that of a navigator, the difference in time caused by these obstructions may be just the difference of his going right to the mouth of the harbor, and his going upon the shoal. Hence great interests may be determined by just so little a thing as a bit of dust. These little things are very insignificant when floating in the air; but when they are brought one after another into contact with sensitive machinery, are they not important? They cease to be little when measured by what they have done. Little things may be important by what they draw after them.

I can imagine, in the visions of the night, as the old miller sleeps, that a craw-fish comes to him and threatens him. You know what a craw-fish is. It is a homely little fresh-water lobster, that loves water and mud. He threatens the miller with disaster except upon some condition granted. The surly old miller laughs to scorn the threat of the craw-fish. The craw-fish departs. The miller by and by wakes up, and starts his mill, and away goes the wheel, making music to his ear. The craw-fish goes to the dam above. He is not much. The river is a thousand times mightier than he; and so is the massive dam. But he commences to bore into the clay. He keeps boring, and boring, and boring, till by and by he has made a tunnel clear through to the other side of the bank. And first one drop comes through: and then another; and then another; and each drop takes a little dirt with it. Gradually the hole grows larger and larger. This goes on all day and all night; and at length the channel is so worn that a considerable stream runs through it. And at last that stream becomes a freshet, and gains a force and impetus such that it carries everything with it. And away go the abutments and timbers of the dam; and away goes the miller's mill; and away goes his house upon the bank; and the trees and all things are whelmed in the flood!

Now which is the stronger, the crawfish or the miller and his dam? The crawfish is a little thing; it was a small hole that he made; but ah! it was what it led to that determines its importance. The craw-fish was big enough for a beginning; and there were other causes behind him that led to still other causes; so that by and by what an engineer could scarcely have done was done by this little boring craw-fish. Whether a thing be a trifle or not, depends upon its power to prepare the way for another thing; and upon the power of that thing to prepare for yet another thing; and so on. It depends upon whether it is the first of a train or series, and draws consequences after it There are thousand of things which when you consider them simply in their own light seem very insignificant, but which when you consider them in relation to after causes become of transcendent value. It will never do to call things little till you see what they can do.

A little thing, or that which men call little, may be very trifling, indeed, for one purpose, and in one direction; and yet, for another purpose, and in another direction, it may be extremely potent.

The captain of a ship wishes to spread his sails, and go out of the harbor, and there is the merest puff of wind—only just enough to flare a candle—it is an insignificant thing, and a man has to wet his hand and hold it up to know which way it comes from. And the captain will never raise an anchor for that. He says, "Pshaw! it is but a breath." It is of no use as a motive power at all; and yet, if

just that is coming through a broken pane of glass upon an invalid it is tremendously powerful.

My mother went out, after a sickness, to the old brown school-house in Litchfield, and sat down and listened to an evening lecture; and behind her, in one of the rude windows of six by eight glass, a pane was broken. The absence of that pane there was very little, so far as its damage to the whole school-house was concerned; but there came through it one of those evening draughts or breaths of air, which was good for nothing for moving a ship, and fell upon her neck, and chilled her, and struck to her heart; and in less than three months she died. To a sailor it was very little; but to her it was very great.

That which in certain conditions of mind is of no consequence, in other conditions of mind may become omnipotent. That which in certain states of mind may have very little or no influence, one way or another, in critical circumstances may have the power of final determination, and may carry in it God's decree for good or for evil.

Let us apply these familiar illustrations.

In forming character, little things go a great way, both by the power of aggregation, of which I have spoken, and because they have critical relations to mind and temperament, to times and seasons. For all the three reasons which I have alleged, little things have great power in determining character, when men are forming their characters. It is but a very small thing for a man to jest at sacred things. The vanity of wit may lead a young man to quote Scripture at the expense of reverence for Scripture. And if he is rebuked he may say, "It is a great pother that you make about a little thing." In one way it amounts to a little; but in another way it amounts to a great deal. Because, when you have begun to take off the enamel from the back of a mirror, every particle that you scrape off, every scratch that you make, mars the image that the mirror reflects. And every time you trifle with reverent or sacred things, it is as though you scratched a mirror; and afterward every image that you see when you look at those things is marred. An irreverent jest is a little thing; but its influence on the moral sense, and upon veneration, is a great thing, because it leads to another thing which is still worse, and another thing which is worse than that, until by and by the power of invisible and venerable things on the soul is well-nigh destroyed.

It is a very little thing when one falls into the habit of salacious wit and narrative. A man may scorn the imputation of impure morals, although his tongue is not clean, and call it an external fault; and yet, when men are forming character, and indulging themselves in conversation that soils delicacy and purity, and fills the mind with

associations that had better have been left out, they take down the barriers. The influences of sensitiveness and delicacy are a barrier which God puts between good and bad, to keep men from the bad; and although a man may be indelicate, and not go over, yet the barriers are taken away, and it will be easier for him to go over. And if he is saved, it will be by the grace of God. It is a little thing, to be sure; but it is one of those little things that have a long end.

It is a small matter for one to indulge himself in petty things; little pleasures; little self-indulgences, each one of which is infinitesimal, it may be; but the habit which is formed in that respect makes little things, no one of which seems to be of any account, to be of very great account.

Now, there are many men who would not blaspheme—oh, no! but they would use cowards' oaths. When a man wants to say, "By Jehovah!" he says, "By Jupiter!" When a man wants to say, "Damn it!" he says, "Darn it!" When a man wants to say, "I swear!" he says, "I swow!" When a man wants to be profane, he does not dare to be profane, and take the comfort of it, and so he resorts to such modified expressions as these.

Now, to rebuke a man who says, "By George," and, "By thunder," as being profane, seems to be unreasonable. I should not make it a capital offence; I should not say that a man who fell into these ways of speaking was unprincipled; but I would say to every young man and maiden—for I think that sometimes maidens need exhortation on this subject—that these little speeches lead to intemperate speeches, which by and by lead to more audacious oaths. I would say that they have a tendency in the wrong direction.

"Let your communication be yea, yea, or nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

So said the Master; and I think he knew.

There are a great many persons who are thoroughly of the opinion that black lies are wicked; but of white lies they have a better opinion. Now, what is a white lie? Well, you cannot give any definition of it except that it is a small lie? What is a small lie? Well, it is an untruth in some trivial matter. And, in so far as the consequences are concerned, it may be trivial; as, for instance, where you deceive a child, and he forgets it, and you forget it. A white lie is a deception, like that of telling a person that you have not been where you have been, when he has no business to know anything about it.

When Walter Scott was writing one of his novels, and he did not wish it known that he was the author of it, and a man said to him, "Are you the author of that novel?" he said, "No, I am not." And in his own letters, in his life, he makes the distinct statement that he had a right to deny what other people had no business to know. That

was the moral ground which he took. Is not that a tenable ground? I do not ask whether persons' weaknesses may not sometimes throw them upon such a ground. I do not ask whether you would not do the same thing under the same circumstances. I take the ground that if a man indulges in a falsehood in a great thing, he will in a little; and that if he does it in a little thing, he is easily led to do it in a great. I am not asking whether men would not do so and so. Very likely I would. But that would not make it any better. The question is, Is it right? Is it safe? Is it honorable? Is it consistent with the Christian idea of character? I say that little lies are not as dangerous as lions. Neither are little vermin. And yet, a man had better have his head clean and his skin clean.

Men think frequently that little thefts constitute a subdivision of guilt. They do not believe in allopathic stealing; but they do in homeopathic. I hold to the homeopathic theory, which teaches that the power of medicine is not in proportion to its largeness or smallness—that there is just as much power in one of these pilules as there is in the old bolus. And, so far as moral quality is concerned, a man that steals a pin, *steals*. It may not hurt the merchant so much, but it hurts you just as much—more sometimes, because it is more insidious; because it does not affect your conscience; because it leads you to do other things, step by step, obliterating that sensibility which is a warning and a guard. Great crimes, begun early, would shock men and hold them back; and little thefts are the nits which hatch out into great ones. No man who means well by himself should ever permit himself to color the truth, or to tell the smallest falsehood. If he does, let him not own to himself that he has not sinned. No man who means well by himself should indulge in the lightest-fingered thieving —in taking the smallest particle which does not belong to him. It is better to be honest and true in the inward man, clear down to the bottom of motive and interest. Do that, and you are safe. But if you indulge in little things that are wrong, you do not know where those little things will carry you.

So I might go on to prove that it is true of vices generally, that small ones become large ones. And yet, inducing these greater dangers, they soothe a man's fear; they conciliate his conscience, and bribe it; they take away all the instincts of apprehension. Men grow bad faster when they commit a shoal and multitude of little sins, of various kinds.

Considered in the light of moral aggregation, I remark again, single actions may be insignificant, and yet, by repetition may become well-nigh omnipotent. There is nothing, I suppose, that is more feeble than a single strand of a spider's web. I read an account, only

a few days ago, of a man who saw a very curious spectacle—that of a black snake more than a foot long suspended in the air in a perfect sack of spider's web. And the spider was not a large one. It was one of these small spiders. It bore no proportion to its victim. Nor could he by any biting hurt him. But there he had him imprisoned. He had drawn him, little by little, into the air; and the snake could not help himself. Probably the serpent was torpid; or the enemy was so small that he did not know that he was upon him. And the spider spun out of his bowel a little film, not a third part as large as the smallest silk thread that a woman uses withal; and he dipped down and touched the snake with it, and it stuck. He took another little film, and touched him with that, and it stuck. He went on industriously; and as the snake lay quiet, he put another and another film upon him. And as there was time enough, he added another and another, till there were a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand of them. And by and by these little weak strands, no one of which was strong enough to hold a gnat, when multiplied became strong enough to encase the victim. A million times stronger the snake was than that miserable little spider, and yet the spider caught him, he webbed him round and round, until when he tried to move he was held fast. That web had grown strong out of its weakness. By putting one strand here, and another there, and drawing on this, that and the other, the spider at last lifted the burden, and it hung suspended in the air.

I have seen men webbed by offences in that same way; and no one of the offences was much larger than the film of a spider's web; and at last they were imprisoned and destroyed. Where men are coming to any great crisis, for instance, in their lives, how very strong little things are; as, sometimes, when they are balancing in their minds whether they will give up drinking courses or not! Men have been in bad company, and have been indulging in all manner of wickedness. God leads them through some dark way or other, and gives them a shock; or, through some gradual work on the soul, he leads them more and more to sobriety and thoughtfulness; and they are coming to that point in which they are to decide whether they shall or shall not change their lives.

Three men sent for Mr. Morton, the missionary of the Bethel, to go and see them; and he appointed a time for meeting them; and when he met them, they said to him, "We have been drinking men; and we have all of us been in your class; and we have come to the conclusion that we have been drinking too much. We have been leaving off little by little; and now we have come to the conclusion that it is best for us to leave off entirely. And we have asked you to come in and have us sign the pledge, and shake hands with us."

So the pledge was signed, and they shook hands all round. And then they said, after a moment's hesitation, "We feel as though this was not enough. We feel as though if there is anything in religion, it was time that we had it. And we have asked you to come that you might tell us how to get it."

Now, there was a time in those men's lives when they did not break out in that full-blossomed way. There was a time of struggle, of hesitation, in which the motives on the one side and the other were almost balanced. There was a time, probably, at which, if some old boon companion, some big-hearted man, whose blood ran through him like a gulf-stream, and generated a great deal of magnetism, and carried folks away with him, had met these men, they would have been swept from their moorings, and would have fallen back upon their old ways, and there would have been no pledge, and no religion, and no salvation in the heavenly land, for them. There was a time when, coming to New York, a slight thing might have determined your everlasting destiny. For, when things are nearly balanced, it takes but little to turn them.

Here, in one scale, is half a ton. The weigher goes to work and throws into the other scale a hundred pounds, and another hundred pounds, and another hundred, till there are five, six, seven, eight, nine hundred pounds there; and then he throws in fifty pounds more, and twenty-five more, and twenty more, and one more, and three more, and half a pound more, and a quarter of a pound more, and a quarter more. And then up goes the other scale; and they are just at equipoise. Now, throw one ounce into one scale, and down it will go. In the beginning five hundred pounds did not start it; but when a scale is at equipoise one ounce will make it kick.

So it is when men are brought to the decision to go forward in a right way; to forsake a bad course; to lift themselves up to a higher sphere of life; to live for spiritual good and not for fleshly good; to live for the life that is to come, as well as for the life that now is. In these fearful moments of decision, the drinking of a cup of liquor, which at another time, though not prudent, might not have proved disastrous, will sweep away that sensibility which is the last ground of hope that remains, and destroy the soul. It is a perilous thing, in such an hour as that, for a man to throw himself where pleasures may entice, where indulgences may solicit, where anything may come in to unsettle his purpose. It takes very little to carry down the scale when it stands at equipoise. Very often the least thing will do it.

I say this, because I have been for so long a time dealing with men that I know what their feelings are, and I know that such warning is often needed when men are serious minded; when they are very near

to the kingdom of God—as near as some of you are to-night—so near that it would take the merest pressure of the hand to bear them over the line, and within the sacred precinct. Men ridicule us, sometimes, who do not well consider what they say, and who do not understand the nature of moral qualities, when we say to a man, "Withhold yourself even from lawful pleasures; do not go into company which at other times you might properly keep; God's Spirit strives with you; your heart is brought into such a temper, and under such influences, that that which would be perfectly allowable at another time is not wise at this crisis." As, when a person is sick, diet which in health is perfectly right is bad for him; so, when a man is coming back to himself and to his Saviour, there are many things which he ought not to do, because in such critical hours and moments little things go so far.

When guides are taking men along Alpine stretches, in the forenoon, when the sun has begun to shine, and the vast avalanches lie above, they will not let them speak, and say to them, as they begin to make the turn, "While going round this ravine on the narrow path let no man say a word." And so they go in silence, one after another. Why? Because so exactly balanced, sometimes, is the avalanche, that the echo, and the vibration of the air which is produced, will be just what is necessary to break the last icicle that holds it; and down will come the avalanche. At other points in the passage they may shout as loud as they please, and it will do no harm; but there are critical points where the guide says, "Hush, and do not even whisper." It is a very little thing; but oh! does it not take hold of tremendous consequences?

A companion that is good for hours of health, may be a bad companion for hours of sickness. A companion that is good for ordinary times, may, at certain critical times of a man's moral history, be ruinous, not intending it. Thousands of men have been destroyed in this world, I doubt not, who never knew, nor suspected even, that it was the smallest circumstance that determined their destruction. As trains are destroyed by the movement of a switch no more than the tenth part of an inch, so little things often determine, at critical periods, men's fate for time, and for eternity.

Are there not persons here, to-night, who are about to plunge to-morrow into the world again? Are there not persons here whose hearts have been brought to some degree of glow, and who have in them yearnings and aspirations? It may be that some great trouble has brought you to this. It may be that some revelation of God's truth has been made known to you. If you nourish it, if you shield it, it will be kindled into a blaze of grace that shall one day mingle with the celestial fire. If you neglect it, if you suffer the rude wind to blow upon it, it may

be extinguished, and the light may never again be kindled in your heart and conscience.

A band of hunters, going out, toil all day with little success, and are, by the rain and sleet which pelts upon them, driven into the woods, where they are overtaken by the night, and are lost. They cannot extricate themselves, and they will perish if they cannot kindle a fire. They search, and there is but a single match left. Their whole safety depends upon that. If they can strike that, and thereby ignite sticks of wood, they will survive; but if not, they may die before morning. They hold counsel. They seek the shady side of a tree. They hunt for dry bits of moss. They get slivers of the dryest wood. They gather together the best material within their reach, and put it where neither the wind nor the rain can find it. The match must not be lost, and one of them slips his boot off from his foot. The wind is up, and sweeps past them; and no hat, nor sheltering tree can protect that match. So, far down in the cavern of the boot he scrapes it on the soul. And, blessed be God! it takes fire. They cannot bring it out. It is a very little thing. But oh! it is life or death to these men. If it goes out they are gone; and if it is kept they are saved. Fortunately the moss catches, and the wood begins to burn—first one little bit, and then another little bit, and then another, until by and by the blazing moss may be brought out. And then the wind rather helps it, if it is not too strong. And at last the large pieces of wood are kindled, and there is a glorious fire, and the wind that now is permitted to blow full upon it is God's bellows to bring up the life-giving element. And the large mass crackles and blazes. And they are safe. They can now put on what they have a mind to, and the wind may blow as hard as it pleases, but they are safe. There was, however, a point where they were in jeopardy.

There is many and many a man who may by and by be perfectly hardy in exposure, and in the indulgence of lawful things; but there are critical times in these men's histories—in their household histories; in their business histories; in their conscience life and their spiritual life. There are times when the flickering flame of their hope is liable to be extinguished. And that is the meaning of the word of God when it is said that Christ is one who *will not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, until he shall bring forth judgment unto victory.* He will not put out the spark that is kindling the wick of hope in any soul, until he consummates the work of grace in that soul.

Finally—not to draw these illustrations out unduly, and weary you—am I extravagant when I warn you, young men, and men of life and business? Do I overdraw the picture, or exaggerate it, when I bid you beware of little sins of every kind? A serpent's tooth is small,

and a scorpion's sting is small; but they carry death. And little sins are small; but many and many a man has lain down in final anguish because they stung him to death. Beware of all sins. Beware of little sins especially.

And do I exaggerate when I tell you that in the critical passages of your life you cannot afford to do things which you would fain do? O serious-minded man! O woman, on whose heart God has laid affliction, and whom he has called to fulfill long-delayed vows! O father of a family, that has no exemplar, on whose judgment and on whose conscience has rested for a long time the unfulfilled duties of religious life! have you not been brought again and again to the point, almost, of decision, and fallen away from it, until it has become harder and harder every year for you to get your own attention, or bring yourself to the point of a resolution? Neither can you describe nor tell me what it was that balked the decision. You cannot tell why it was, when you came so near to the kingdom of God, that you did not enter in. It was because of some little thing, so inconspicuous that you did not yourself recognize what it was, and yet mighty enough to destroy your moral purpose, mighty enough to carry you thus far down the way of life again, in old habits, old selfishness, old pride, old worldliness, disobeying God, forfeiting your own hope, and preparing the way for your own destruction. And now the time comes round again. I know that there are children of Christian parents here who never can hear the truth preached faithfully, that their hearts do not sound out like the soldier's drum. The "long roll" they hear; and their fears start up on every side. There are such men here to-night. There are men here who have scarcely eased themselves of the burden of an old sorrow. There are men here to whom I can say, very truthfully, "You are not far from the kingdom of God. You are convinced in your judgment and in your consciences; and your hearts are touched; and you are very near to the point of deciding. A little thing will do it. There are some men here who, I think, if they would, when they go home to-night, gather their wife and children about them and say to them, "Help me; for from this time forth I am going to try to live a Christian life," would find that it would strike the balance the right way; and they would be saved. But if they neglect it, the balance will go the other way, and they will be destroyed. I believe there are men here who, if they would make one vehement effort to break up a bad habit, would thus take the first of a series of steps which would bring them into a spiritual change.

I do not say that a man who uses tobacco is a great sinner. I would not take extravagant ground on that subject. But I would take the ground that this is one of the bad habits that it is hard to break off from; and therefore I say that a man who would make up his mind to

cast that out, would find that this strain of his nerve for the sake of a moral result, though it was a little thing, would be a very decisive thing. I have known many a man who had taken a single step in reform, and who, if he had had the strength of purpose to take another step would have been carried along and saved, but who, for the want of that strength of purpose, was destroyed. If men are wise, when they have taken the first step in the right direction they will not stop till they have taken the second, and many more.

I believe there are men here to-night who, if they would say to their companions, "Give me your hand; I will not drink another drop again," would be saved from the drunkard's grave. You are going to destruction along the way of intemperance. You know it, though you deny it. And your friends know it, though they do not tell you so; and if you would say to those who know you, "Before God I declare that from this time I will be clean in this matter," it would be the means of your salvation. That small thing is not religion; but it is the first step toward it; and you will take another, and another, and another, until they bring you into the kingdom of God.

There are men here who have not bent the knee in prayer for years and years, and who, if they would go home and bend the knee before they sleep, and pray to God for help, would be taking a decisive step in the right direction in their history. Why? Because praying saves a man? Oh no. It is not because there is a charm in that thing. It is a little thing, to be sure; but it is one of those small acts which are likely to carry you forward to the next step, and the next, in the work of your salvation.

There are many men in my hearing to-night who are so near to a right life, who are so convinced that they have been going wrong, who are so desirous of mending their lives, and whose sympathies, and companionships, and hopes, and better judgment, and aspirations so set in that way, that if they would take the least step seriously with the purpose of making it the first step of a series, it would be to them a parting from sin and the kingdom of darkness, and an approaching to righteousness and the kingdom of light and glory.

Now, I beseech you, look upon this thing to-night. I speak to you as to my brethren. Heed what I say, not from my profession, but from my personal sympathy with you, a citizen among citizens, having no right to give you advice except that right which comes from love. Your salvation is your concern personally. Ponder what I have said. Consider whether it is not good sense, and whether it has not experience under it. Take heed to it.

Are there not some here who will go to their rooms to-night better and soberer? Young men, wake up. Break off from your sin? It

is but a moment's pleasure, and it is endless damnation! O maiden called of God! let not that spark which has been kindled be put out by the unruly wind or the scowling storm. Listen to your mother's God that calls you. O father! O mother! let your children have some one to guide them through the dark way in this world. O friends and neighbors! take hold of hands, and part from Satan, and from all his wiles. And lift up your eyes. Your salvation draweth nigh. It lingereth not. It shall come. And God shall save you with an everlasting salvation.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Vouchsafe to us, our Heavenly Father, the Divine illumination. Grant to us more light. Grant us thine influence. Breathe upon us, that we may have power both to conceive all things that are right and noble, and to do the same. For in thee we live and move and have our being. Though we cannot discern thee; though we may not have such commerce with thee as we have with one another; though thou art a Spirit, and we are in the body; though we cannot with these dull instruments of the flesh discern spiritual things knowingly; yet thou art, and thou makest thy presence felt, and thou dost fill the hearts of those that believe on and trust thee with great joy. And in the communications of thy grace there are hours of blessed certainty and hours of revelation. Thou dost lift up thy people upon the mountain-top. Then thou art changed, and becomest radiant; and against the sky thou art brighter than any star that is in it.

O Lord! we thank thee for even these hours of transfiguration; and if in them we forget the duties of life, and fain would make tabernacles to abide in sweet experiences, below us are all the miseries of mankind, and we come down again, better, stronger, truer, more faithful, and pursue afterward, in the lower ways of life, our duties with more alacrity, for the high and blessed privileges which we have enjoyed.

Grant unto every one of thy children, as thou seest that they need, these intimations and revelations of thyself. If there be those who do not know how to trust thee, if there be those whose faith is very weak, if there be those that believe, and yet cry out, "Help my unbelief," Lord be very gracious unto such. And if they cannot walk alone, bear them in thine arms, thou Shepherd that dost carry the lambs. According to their weakness and their want let thy mercies abound unto them. Be gracious to all who would draw near thee with humble confession. We know their weakness. We know the strength of their wickedness. We know how defective they are in things that are right. We know how powerful in them are tendencies to evil. O Lord! we pray that thou wilt hear the cry of such souls. They do not desire captivity. They do not desire to be led astray by the strength of their passions. And though at times all their passions are as the mountains full of the Philistines, and their better resolutions are as thy people beaten small in the valleys, yet they cry unto thee, and thou dost overthrow their adversaries. If to-night they ask for Divine help against their own pride and worldliness, Lord, turn not away thine ear from their petition. If there are those who wish to make their way toward virtue, or to progress in anything pertaining to the true life of Christ, we beseech of thee that thou wilt reveal thyself to

them. If there is but a spark, thou art He that will not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax, until thou dost bring forth judgment unto victory. Be with those that need thee by reason of the greatness of their sin and their wickedness. And we beseech of thee that thou wilt draw near to all those that are cast down through despondency or remorse; to all those that wish they were dead, and yet dare not die; to all those that go forth into life seeing no glory in it.

How many there are who have been swept away and snared! How many there are who find their way in life so steep that they cannot climb it. Oh Lord! save them from discouragement; and grant that they may not slip backward toward perdition. May they hear the voice of hope crying unto them—the voice of God—saying, "Come up hither." May there be many to-night that shall lift their weary hands, that shall gird up their loins and enter upon the battle of life contesting evil, running from the mistakes of their past life, showing their sincerity in repentance of sin by a better walk, by forsaking that which is wrong, and by endeavoring to strengthen others in the respects in which thou dost strengthen them. We pray that thou wilt teach us to be more gentle and merciful. May we take our lessons, not from one another, but from Him in whom alone we hope for redemption. Grant that the sense of life's shortness may throw itself upon us, not to daunt us nor discourage us, but to put away untimely levity, and give us more earnestness, and make us do what our hands find to do, remembering that the night cometh fast in which we can do no more work.

Wilt thou grant thy blessing to rest upon all that are in thy presence as they severally need. And we pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to all thy churches; to thy ministering servants; to all that preach the Gospel. Wilt thou comfort and strengthen them, and grant that they may see as the result of their labor a great harvest. Fulfill thy promises to all the earth. Cause wars to cease. Cause injustice and those oppressions which breed war to cease. May ignorance which tempts oppressors, itself be enlightened. May superstition, and all the mischiefs of depravity cease in all the earth. And may that blessed day of prediction come, when Christ shall reign a thousand years.

And to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, shall be praises everlasting. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt bless the word of truth which we have spoken. Grant that it may be blessed to many souls. Awaken thoughtfulness; awaken desire; awaken conscience; awaken fear. May all our feelings strive with us. For how great is the darkness around us! How great is the current, and how strong the pressure toward things selfish, and carnal, and worldly! Without thy spirit we can do nothing. We need its light; we need its warmth; we need its encouragement. We need, O Lord God! that thou shouldst work in us to will and to do of thine own good pleasure. Thou art working. Blessed be God, thou dost not measure thy mercies by our desert. But how many art thou calling who do not deserve such mercies as thou art desirous of bestowing upon them! How many that are in thy presence have thrown away thy bounties in times past, and sinned against light and knowledge! And yet thou art come again. Before how many hearts dost thou stand to-night, knocking? To how many art thou saying, Open, and let me come in. My locks are wet with the dews of the night. O God of pious

mothers and sainted fathers! look upon the children that are left behind them, and have mercy upon them. O Lord God! join again in more blessed wedlock those who stand severed, loving each other with earthly love, but having no common hope in heaven above. O Lord God! look upon the young, and see how they are spoiled, how they are as sheep for the shambles, in this devouring city. Oh! have mercy upon them. And grant that to-night, by thy grace, many of them may be called, and that they may heed the call of God, and come to newness of life. Let thy work be revived. Pour out thy Spirit mightily in the hearts of thy people. And in all thy churches may we hear of multitudes awakened, and multitudes converted.

And to the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, shall be praises evermore. *Amen.*

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